

STATEMENT OF JOHN PARSONS, ASSOCIATE REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR LANDS, RESOURCES AND PLANNING, NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING THE OVERSIGHT OF THE NATIONAL MALL.

April 12, 2005

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, it is my pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the National Park Service's management and planning for the National Mall.

The National Park Service is extremely proud to be the steward of the nation's front yard, which has come to be known as the National Mall. Designed by Pierre L'Enfant and established by President George Washington and Thomas Jefferson in 1791, this grand open space has been jointly nurtured and guided by the Executive, Congressional, and Judicial branches of government for over two centuries.

L'ENFANT PLAN – 19TH CENTURY VISION

In 1791, Pierre L'Enfant, a French designer, established a plan to serve as the framework for the Capital city of Washington, D.C. This plan, known as the L'Enfant Plan, (Exhibit A) delineated an east/west boulevard that extended from the hill upon which the Capitol would be located, one mile west to a site identified for the Washington Monument, where it intersected with the north/south axis where he sited the President's house on a hill to the north. While the design of the L'Enfant Plan remains in place today, implementation during the 19th century was slow to non-existent. In fact, by the end of the 19th century, the area was a patchwork of, in some cases,

jarringly inconsistent and fragmented uses, such as a railroad station and individual landscapes managed by a host of different agencies and organizations.

McMILLAN PLAN – 20th CENTURY VISION

In 1900, Senator James McMillan, who was chairman of the committee on the District of Columbia, recognized the erosion of the L'Enfant Plan for the area and the city at large. He created a commission of preeminent architects, planners, and designers who created a new vision that reinforced L'Enfant's principles and restored the area's historic sweep. This 1901 plan, known as the McMillan Plan, (See Exhibit B) doubled the area's size by extending its east/west axis one mile to the site of the Lincoln Memorial, and one-half mile to the south, which is anchored by the Jefferson Memorial on axis with the White House. This grand plan has resulted in this magnificent landscape, which is the National Mall. Flanked by federal museums that contain our national treasures and punctuated by national memorials that celebrate our nation's most important persons and events, the National Mall has evolved into a powerful symbol of democracy for this nation throughout the world.

In 1910, Congress established and charged the Commission of Fine Arts to ensure that the McMillan Plan for the National Mall was completed with the highest degree of civic art. In 1926, Congress established the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) to ensure the continuation of good planning for the city in the tradition of L'Enfant and McMillan. In 1935, the National Park Service was given the responsibility of managing this park where the people of this country and the world come for education, celebration, demonstration, and recreation. One of the McMillan Commission's recommendations had been to place the National Mall under the

administration of one agency to avoid the re-emergence of the patchwork of competing and conflicting uses.

While widely supported, the McMillan Plan was not without detractors. Even with the hard work and perseverance of Congress, the Executive Branch, and others, restoring L'Enfant's vision through the implementation of the McMillan Plan took most of the 20th Century. The result of the successful implementation of the L'Enfant and the McMillan Plans is a uniquely designed American landscape – one that must remain as open and energetic as our democracy. We have managed this public space for the American people with care and in consultation with adjacent Federal agencies under the McMillan Plan guidance.

LEGACY PLAN – 21st CENTURY VISION

As the 20th Century drew to a close, it became apparent that, with the completion of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, World War II Memorial, and National Museum of the American Indian, implementation of all the remaining elements of the McMillan Plan that were feasible would be complete. At the same time, there was increasing concern about the growing number of proposals for memorials and museums being placed on the National Mall. Consequently, in 1990, the NCPC initiated a new public planning process for the city's urban core. As with the McMillan Plan, the NCPC engaged a group of preeminent architects, planners, and designers to assist in this effort. This framework plan was completed by the NCPC in 1997 to guide long-term growth and is called "Extending the Legacy," as it is based on the legacy of the two landmark plans, the L'Enfant Plan and the McMillan Plan. The Legacy Plan (See Exhibit C) protects the integrity of the National Mall, as we know it today, and, among its

recommendations, it establishes North, South, and East Capitol Streets as they radiate from the Capitol, as the axis of new growth for commemorative works, museums and other public facilities. The National Park Service supports the goals and vision of the Legacy Plan as the 21st Century plan for the nation's Capital and will continue to work with others toward its successful implementation.

THE COMMEMORATIVE WORKS ACT AND THE RESERVE

In 1986, following what some characterized as “monumental chaos” over the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which was dedicated in 1982, Congress enacted the Commemorative Works Act to guide the process for establishing memorials in the nation's Capital. The Commemorative Works Act sets forth the requirements on subject matter, siting, and design of memorials. It also creates the procedure for establishing memorials on parkland, including the approval of both site and design by National Capital Planning Commission, the Commission of Fine Arts, and the Secretary of the Interior. Since its enactment, the Commemorative Works Act has played an important role in ensuring that memorials in the nation's Capital are erected on the most appropriate sites and are of a caliber in design that is worthy of their historically significant subjects.

On November 17, 2003, under your leadership, Mr. Chairman, Congress concurred with principles of the Legacy Plan and declared the National Mall complete by establishing the Reserve (See Exhibit D) through an amendment to the Commemorative Works Act. With the creation of the Reserve under Public Law 108-126, the National Mall is now protected from any future construction of memorials or museums within this completed work of civic art. Your

Congressional action creating the Reserve, together with the Legacy Plan's refocus on the importance of the Capitol, has lessened urgent development pressures on the National Mall and thus created ideal circumstances for the National Park Service to begin the planning for long-term preservation and enhancement of this historic landscape.

ONGOING PLANNING

The National Park Service is working with current memorial proponents to ensure that siting of memorials is guided by the Memorials and Museums Master Plan. This 2001 master plan was an outgrowth of the Legacy Plan and redirects proponents away from the Reserve to worthy sites throughout the city as well as sites in the Monumental Core, which extends from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington Cemetery and from the White House to the Potomac River. We currently are working with the proponents of seven Congressionally authorized memorials and are guiding them to sites identified in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan. Four memorials have already received site approvals using the Master Plan.

The National Park Service is working with NCPC and the District of Columbia to support the South Capitol Street corridor that will enhance the river park system, Mayor Anthony Williams' Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, and the site for the new baseball stadium. As proposed, South Capitol Street would become a grand boulevard with a major urban park at its terminus on the Anacostia River. (See Exhibit E) A revitalized South Capitol Street is the centerpiece of the Mayor's Initiative and would be invigorated through major private investment in mixed-use development, including cultural institutions, housing, and retail. While South Capitol Street would provide multiple sites for cultural institutions, museums and memorials as well as

parkland, it is not envisioned that this streetscape would be managed by the National Park Service. The revitalization of South Capitol Street will ensure that sites for major memorials are set aside for future generations as called for in the Legacy Plan and the Memorials and Museums Master Plan. While the Legacy Plan establishes the framework for these emergent areas north, and south of the Capitol, these areas are envisioned as adjuncts to the Monumental Core that will evolve and mature with their own identity, like the other special avenues in the nation's Capital such as Connecticut or Massachusetts Avenues.

In 2003, the National Park Service entered into a partnership agreement with the Trust for the National Mall, a private nonprofit organization established to assist in the raising of funds for enhancements. The agreement authorizes the Trust to raise funds and in-kind donations for National Park Service restoration, revitalization and maintenance projects. The agreement is part of a long-term partnership designed to enhance the National Mall's prominence and relevance to the diverse communities it serves. Funds raised by the Trust are intended to move the National Mall to a new level of excellence.

The National Park Service has numerous projects under construction involving the roads, security, and environs of the memorials and symbols of our democracy as well as the streets and avenues of the National Mall, including the preservation of the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials, security improvements designed to be compatible with the historic character of the Washington Monument and Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials, and pedestrian and traffic safety improvements at Lincoln Circle and at Ohio Drive along the Potomac River. These projects have all benefited from the public planning process used by the National Park Service in their development.

Despite the fact that in considering these projects, the National Park Service assessed the effect of each on the National Mall, there, nevertheless, have been concerns expressed that planning for individual projects erodes the overall integrity of the National Mall. We have listened to these concerns and seek to address them.

While the National Park Service 1972 plan for the National Mall and subsequent plans for parts of the area provide guidance, we acknowledge there is no single current plan focusing on National Park Service management of the National Mall. This is something the National Park Service intends to rectify. The National Mall regularly experiences extremely high levels of use and landscape conditions have suffered. This must be addressed in planning. The planning process must be open and inclusive — the witnesses today and the American public will all be participants with us in this important effort to preserve existing landmark plans by planning for future use. The National Park Service has begun a public planning process that would result in the National Mall Comprehensive Management Plan. The plan will examine the following issues:

- enhancement of the identity of the National Mall,
- preservation of the historic landscape and character,
- improved landscape maintenance,
- maintenance of the National Mall for First Amendment activities, special events, and national cultural heritage and recreation,
- sustainable use levels,

- accommodation of jurisdictional missions of the National Park Service, District of Columbia, Architect of the Capitol, General Services Administration, Smithsonian, and the National Gallery of Art,
- preservation and protection of the open space of the Reserve in fulfillment of legislative mandates, and
- continuation and support of a vibrant urban life.

Everyone here cares deeply about the National Mall and is concerned about maintaining its open space and character for the future. Historic planning sets an indelible course, one that continues to enrich our nation. Planning now for future use and preservation is vital.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Chairman Thomas for his leadership in the protection of the National Mall, particularly the careful study and development of the area now established as the Reserve. Your stewardship of this special place has enabled us to keep intact the core of President George Washington's intended planning for our nation's front yard. This concludes my prepared remarks. I will be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.